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SUBJECT: President Mahinda Rajapaksa's Independence Day Speech

¶1. (U) In his February 4th speech to the nation, President Mahinda Rajapaksa said that for thirty years, Sri Lankans have lived in the midst of an illegal, armed, terrorist movement which prevented the country from celebrating 'true' freedom. President Rajapaksa reminded the people of his 2005 Presidential Election Pledges, noting that he became President to "defeat the foundations of a cowardly peace based on the victory of separatist terror and instead establish a genuine and dignified peace for our land." He quote his 2005 presidential election policy statement in which he declared that his platform was for an "undivided country, a national consensus and an honorable peace."

Terrorism "almost completely defeated"

¶2. (U) The President announced that the "cowardly forces of terror" have been "almost completely defeated". He thanked Sri Lankan troops for sacrificing their 'flesh, blood, sinews and life itself to bring this historic opportunity to our motherland.' He also said: "Our troops were able to carry forward the battle against terror with great care so as not to cause harassment to the innocent Tamil people."

Challenges Remain

¶3. (U) President Rajapaksa announced that unlike most countries suffering from separatist terrorism, Sri Lanka has been able to defeat terrorism and separatism and to safeguard the unitary nature of the State. Therefore, he said that it was time for all Sri Lankans - Sinhala, Tamil, Muslim, Burgher Malay and others - who had fled their country to return to their motherland. The President expressed confidence that in a few days the government would decisively defeat the terrorist force. But he said that the country still faces challenges:

- Providing a more productive education,
- Providing a public service which considers the people as it's master
- good governance and prosperity leaving no room for corruption and waste
- defeating our internal enemies

Social Justice

¶4. (U) President Rajapaksa declared that the future is for the building of social justice. He said that he agreed with James Wolfenson's theory that there is not much space for peace and stability wherever social and economic expectations have been destroyed. So he encouraged the country towards a campaign for "social, economic, cultural and political progress".

## Tamils in the North and East

¶15. (U) At the end of his speech, President Rajapaksa urged Sri Lankans to "cooperate with people of the north and east who have suffered under the grip of separatist terror for many years". He called on Sri Lankans to give them "the kindness, friendship and prosperity they deserve". He went on to invite all parties to come together irrespective of ethnicity, community and party difference to do their duty by the motherland.

¶16. (U) COMMENT: This was a vintage Rajapaksa nationalist, populist speech. The President appeared intent on reaching out to his Sinhala base to consolidate his support before forthcoming elections. He mentioned the word "unitary" several times and talked about defeating "internal enemies." But there were also some welcome elements. He twice spoke of the need for good governance and to combat corruption, but there were no specifics - such as the 17th Amendment and the Constitutional Council as vehicles to create independent institutions. He sent a message of friendship to the people of the North, but - unlike in last year's speech - did not mention the need for a political solution. He also stopped short of speaking a of specific political arrangements, such as devolution of power under the 13th Amendment or the proposals of the All-Party Representative Committee (APRC). As a result, the President's speech was a missed opportunity to unite the country, and in particular, to send a message to the Tamil population.

BLAKE